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## Ten Steps for Peace Education

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### Ten Steps for Peace Education From the Alliance for Childhood May 2005

As the world struggles with increasing fears of war and terrorism, the Alliance for Childhood offers the following brief guide for parents and teachers who seek to nurture the values of compassion and good will in their children's lives. It is easy to teach children about war. It is much more challenging to teach them how to create peace. These first steps on a path to peace require only small deeds, but will leave profound impressions.

#### **1. Make Room for Peace at Home**

Outer peace begins with inner peace. Children and adults need special places that give them a sense of privacy and peace, and that can serve as a quiet refuge for times when hurt or angry feelings might lead to violent words or actions. It could be a room or just a corner, decorated simply and lovingly, where any family member can go for quiet reflection or prayer, or to work through turbulent feelings. Put art and writing materials there to help express what lies within.

#### **2. Find Peace in Nature**

Go outside. Take children for a walk or let them explore nature in their own way. The beauty of nature is a great balm to the soul. Children often seek out their own secret outdoor spaces, even if it's only a corner of the backyard. Respect children's need for the private exploration and inner reflection that nature inspires.

### **3. Make Time for Creative Play**

Young children need plenty of time for unstructured, creative play. Make-believe social play reduces aggression and increases empathy in children. Children use play to work through feelings of fear and sadness, to find comfort, and to explore the world and develop relationships. Choose children's toys carefully, avoiding those that encourage or glorify violence. Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children's Entertainment ([www.truceteachers.org](http://www.truceteachers.org)) prepares an annual guide to help parents make wise choices about toys.

### **4. Engage Children's Hands and Hearts**

Children need a direct experience of giving. They love to make things, small and large—their own cards, tree ornaments, cookies, or bread—for neighbors, family, friends, or those in need. They can also learn to enjoy sorting through their own things and giving away some treasured possessions to others in need.

### **5. Establish a "Family Foundation"**

Create a homemade bank for donations—a miniature family foundation. Family and friends can put money in the bank. Children can be introduced to tithing when they receive gifts, earnings, or allowance. Choose a charity together—one that has personal meaning for the children especially—to give to. Charities like the Heifer Project ([www.heifer.org](http://www.heifer.org)) are much loved by children who relate to the practical deed of giving livestock to needy families. When there is news of a flood, fire, or other disaster, the family can respond with a donation from the bank. As the children mature, talk to them more frankly about the needs of the world and ways to help.

### **6. Support Peace Education at School**

Urge your school to establish or strengthen peace-education and conflict-resolution programs. Contact Educators for Social Responsibility ([www.esrnational.org](http://www.esrnational.org)) or the National Peace Foundation ([www.nationalpeace.org](http://www.nationalpeace.org)) for ideas, like how to create “peace places” in schools, where students can go to negotiate and mediate conflicts and resolve disputes nonviolently. Older students can study a conflict-ridden area of the world, looking at it from two or more perspectives. Resources for this kind of study can be found through the Karuna Center for Peacebuilding ([www.karunacenter.org](http://www.karunacenter.org)); Facing History and Ourselves ([www.facinghistory.org](http://www.facinghistory.org)); and Public Conversations Project ([www.publicconversations.org](http://www.publicconversations.org)).

## **7. Face Local Needs**

Help children become comfortable with the people in your community who need help—the elderly, the disabled, and the poor. Starting in middle school, students benefit enormously from working in hospitals, soup kitchens, animal shelters, and the like. Make sure there is someone there to mentor the young person when such experiences become emotionally painful or confusing. Community service can be especially effective for young people who are growing up in socially and economically stressed neighborhoods where they feel undervalued.

## **8. Make a Difference in the World**

Help young people find active ways to collaborate with other children globally, through organizations like Jane Goodall’s Roots and Shoots ([www.janegoodall.org](http://www.janegoodall.org)), Craig Kielburger’s Free the Children ([www.freethechildren.org](http://www.freethechildren.org)), or Peace Jam, in which students work directly with Nobel Peace Laureates ([www.peacejam.org](http://www.peacejam.org)).

## **9. Celebrate Peace**

Link children with others around the world through U.N. celebrations of Peace Day, September 21 (<http://cyberschoolbus.un.org/peaceday/2004/index.asp>). The

World Peace Prayer Society ([www.worldpeace.org](http://www.worldpeace.org)) encourages children and communities to plant a peace pole or host a ceremony of flags from countries around the world. Encourage children to create their own peace prayers, poems, and works of art. Make every day a peace day.

## **10. Share Inspiring Words of Peace from Different Cultures**

Children love to hear aloud the inspiring words of Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and other champions of peace, justice, and nonviolence. Teach children the Golden Rule, common to most religions and philosophies. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" is the basis of social respect and cooperation (see [www.teachingvalues.com/goldenrule.html](http://www.teachingvalues.com/goldenrule.html)). Also see peaceCENTER ([www.salsa.net/peace/prayer14.html](http://www.salsa.net/peace/prayer14.html)) for a list of 12 peace prayers from different world religions, or <http://www.worldprayers.org> for prayers by individuals.

**Prepared by the Alliance for Childhood**  
**[www.allianceforchildhood.org](http://www.allianceforchildhood.org)**  
**Tel/fax 301.779.1033**  
**Email: [info@allianceforchildhood.org](mailto:info@allianceforchildhood.org)**

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